

White Paper

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Next Generation Ph.D. Program

White Paper

**Bridging the Gap: Linking History Ph.D. Training to Non Academic
Employment**

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Part I: What Did We Do?

We began the academic year with a presentation and discussion of our proposal and plans before the Department at a faculty retreat. From the reactions and discussion we identified three key focus issues: parts of the current Ph.D. program that were possible to change; parts that faculty felt should not be altered; key features of Ph.D. training in history that all students should take away regardless of their future career plans. We also gained a sense of how comfortable different faculty were with mentoring students who decide on non-academic careers.

As per our grant application, we assembled a diverse but committed Core Team drawn from within and beyond the university (see appendix A). This group met regularly over the course of the year in sessions to both share points of view and also to learn from a series of external speakers covering what we believed could be key areas of employment for our Ph.D. students (see appendix B).

The Core Team consisted of faculty, administrators, and students. Besides the three PIs, the History Department Chair and the History Department Director of Graduate Studies, a current Ph.D. student, the Associate Dean of our College and senior administrator from the University Graduate School were in regular attendance, along with a faculty member from a related field, Public Administration. All members of the History Department were invited to attend the sessions and several faculty did so at different times. One of our recent Ph.D.s, a current Department post-doctoral student, also attended and served as recording secretary.

We took extensive notes at each meeting, which we made available via SharePoint to all participants as well as all Department faculty. The site housed research materials accumulated throughout the year, as well as materials provided by the NEH.

From the seven meetings held with the Core Team and invited guests we addressed the three focus issues, while also learning about the sorts of skills and experiences that might be necessary for history Ph.D.s. contemplating careers in business, government, cultural or NGO institutions, urban planning and policy, and other possible areas (communications, higher education administration). We expanded our search for information on alternative careers and experiences through a Skype interview with one of our own Ph.D.s, stationed in the UK and working for the Department of Defense.

Two of the PIs, Lipartito and Adler, attended the program directors meeting at the NEH in January. Both believed that this was an extremely valuable experience that helped to calibrate our findings with those of others. The meeting also provided ideas for improving our own self-study. While in Washington, we established contact with the FIU Washington DC Network, which we believe will be a valuable liaison for students interested in government internships and careers going forward. Each of the PIs also attended a number of the CGS Webinars over the course of the year.

The planning grant year coincided with our Department's five year review as mandated by the university. We were thus able to present our ideas and solicit feedback from the Department's external reviewers and to incorporate some of what we were learning from the planning process into our response to the external reviewers and the dean.

As we developed a deeper understanding of career patterns and desirable skills, we also stayed in close contact with Department faculty and students. In the early spring, we held focus groups with colleagues and current graduate students, and distributed surveys to both. Our subsequent meetings and deliberations were guided, in part, by the survey results and the feedback we received.

In March, we held a second all-Department meeting to report on our preliminary findings. We informed the Department that we would be soliciting their further comments in the course of composing the White Paper.

In April, we held the final meeting with the Core Team, where we solicited reflections from members regarding lessons learned. Later, we reached out to our Team to request additional written feedback. Some sent extensive replies to our questions.

A draft of the paper was circulated to the Department in June, before the final draft was completed for submission.

Part II: What Worked Well and Not as Well?

One of our goals was to stimulate dialogue within the Department about career preparation for doctoral students. We feel that we did this effectively. In general our committee structure worked well by keeping a dedicated group of faculty focused on the questions at hand through the monthly meetings with invited speakers. We had occasional participation in these meetings from other History Department faculty, and this was always productive. Though many of the faculty did not participate in all of our monthly presentation/discussions, we did bring ideas and questions to all of them at a retreat and several Department meetings throughout the year. This was an effective way to balance the time demands of meetings against the desire for broad input. On the other hand, it is clear that those of us who participated in the majority of sessions came away with a much stronger willingness to creatively address the challenges facing doctoral programs. We still note resistance among some faculty as we consider shifting our expectations and program structure. Perhaps regular participation by a larger group of faculty would have facilitated a broader culture shift.

We heard presentations from several of our own alumnae who now work in various fields, as well as people with history Ph.D.s from other institutions who work outside of academia. It was quite enlightening to hear people narrate their own—often idiosyncratic—career paths. These were some of the most informative presentations. We wish to do more of this, using it as a springboard for broader conversations across the Department. One of the major themes that

emerged was that people had cobbled together a diverse set of skills building from their personal interests and strengths. There was no magic formula for doing this, but each speaker noted that, in their experience, there were many lost opportunities for faculty advising students who might seek such a path. We believe that if more of our faculty heard people describe their career paths, they might feel more confident talking to students about how to build nonacademic careers.

The sense that a combination of creative initiative, openness to unanticipated opportunity, self-motivation, and confidence in self presentation can be extremely attractive in the job market was evident from many of our speakers. Especially successful was a combination of these personal qualities with the discipline, proven commitment, and high level general job skills that a Ph.D. comes away with.

The participation of a graduate student and several alumni were particularly useful, and we would recommend that all future grantees foreground student involvement. One of our really important takeaways from the discussions was that we need a broad culture shift among faculty and students, and that this culture shift needs to happen through individual and group conversations. Including current students is crucial, and in hindsight we wish we had offered more students opportunities to join our monthly meetings.

The bulk of each monthly meeting was spent listening to presentations from working professionals. Some of these were excellent and stimulated wide-ranging discussions. One particularly successful aspect of this programming was that the presenters went well beyond what might be considered the “usual suspects”—stretching our disciplinary and professional boundaries. Some presenters thus opened unexpectedly fruitful lines of discussion. Other speakers perhaps did not fully understand the purpose of the session, or otherwise did not tailor their presentations to our goals of assessing job opportunities for humanities Ph.D.s. Though the facilitator prompted speakers in advance, future efforts might require additional attention to individual speakers’ contributions. For example, speakers might be specifically instructed that no presentation is expected, and given a list of questions for a Q&A session instead.

Participation by administrators outside of the History Department generally worked very well, particularly because the “outsider” view cut through some of what otherwise might have been overly-disciplinary thinking. Both we and the outside administrators quickly converged on an understanding that what we were doing for humanists resonated strongly with what other disciplines, including the sciences, were also trying to do for their Ph.D.s.

We did a limited literature review of what other institutions are already doing, primarily for the benefit of the PI and co-PIs. Some participants in the Core Team felt that they would have benefited from a clearer presentation of such a literature review, with concrete examples of how curricula were changed to accommodate non-academy careers. This might also have been useful for the Department as a whole, to prompt their thinking about how rigor and career diversity can

complement one another. Such a review of existing initiatives could be incorporated into a career website going forward.

We conducted a survey towards the end of the grant period to assess faculty willingness to shift their practices in various ways. The results were tantalizing, but unfortunately participation was too limited to draw solid conclusions. Planning a survey earlier in the semester and with ample lead-time would likely improve the results. For example, it may have been effective to do a survey with anonymous responses early in the process, the results of which we could have used to prompt further discussion. However, the later survey had the advantage of giving us time and knowledge to formulate better, more precise questions.

We had originally hoped to have participation from university career services, but this did not work out in the end. Moving forward we know that we need to do more to build relationships with existing career advisors in the university. But we also had the sense that the more general and often undergraduate focused resources of the university career office will need to be strongly supplemented with faculty and department wide resources and efforts. Since it was not clear at the start how central career counseling would be to any nonacademic career option for students, we placed less emphasis on this feature than we now, on reflection, might have. One takeaway from our study is that much can be gained with stronger, earlier career intervention with new Ph.D.s.

Part III: What Does It All Mean?

We come away from this year of exploration with three broad reflections. First, our future efforts to enhance our humanities program should be student-centered, guided by the priority of ensuring that our graduates leave us as rigorously trained historians who are able to navigate diverse post-graduation employment opportunities. Our students tend to be minority, first-generation graduate students—in many cases the first in their family to attend college, let alone graduate school. They often do not fit the profile of students at the institutions where many of the faculty earned their doctorates. Second, we must seek to diversify, rather than simply add, to our robust curriculum. Students are already stretched to complete the program and the university is pressuring them to reduce the time to finish their degrees. Students also have considerable Teaching or Research Assistant obligations because of institutional pressures beyond our control. Faculty likewise feel stretched and do not simply want “add on” duties. Third, program enhancements should be aimed not at training students for an academic position *or* a different type of job, but instead at making our graduates better prepared for a variety of types of positions in the academic, non-academic/public history, non-profit, government, and private sectors. The latter principle is based, in part, on our belief that even many academic positions now require training and skills – exposure to digital technology and public engagement, for example – once perceived as “non-academic.” We follow with further reflections on what we learned as related to our main constituencies.

Graduate Students: We solicited feedback from all Department graduate students via an in-person focus group and an online survey. Additionally, a current graduate student and a recent graduate were crucial to each committee meeting and shared their impressions and reflections at the completion of the project.

We learned a great deal about our graduate students' professional plans and their awareness of job market conditions. The survey, which had 18 respondents, revealed that the vast majority – almost 90 percent – enter our graduate program with the goal of an academic career. While some 30 percent alter their goals during their course of study, the majority– 55 percent – said they remained determined, one to four years into the program, to seek employment in academia.

Almost 70 percent of students reported receiving information about post-degree opportunities and professional development specific to academic careers. Fifty percent reported that their awareness of non-academic careers for History Ph.D.s was limited. Across the board students expressed an interest in learning more about possible career paths. They also expressed their hope that the Department could build into the program enhanced training opportunities, since they feel that heavy coursework and teaching demands preclude them from holding jobs or completing internships that go beyond degree requirements. The graduate students serving on our Core Team were excited by the possibilities of pursuing concentrations beyond the History Department and undertaking internships.

We take from our findings the need for a renewed commitment to ensuring that student advising is holistic from the get-go, and that students have the opportunity to develop areas of expertise that could serve them well in the academic job market and beyond. Students must be made aware of academic job market conditions *prior* to entry into the program, and be advised in no uncertain terms that it behooves them to be proactive in exploring internship, community, and interdepartmental work, all of which will pay dividends in the long-run.

The Department must explore the nature of university-level career advising to which students have access and ensure that specialized advising, geared toward humanities Ph.D.s, is available. Faculty should be trained to encourage students to think creatively about career goals and job possibilities, and be aware of university resources that can bolster such efforts as the student progresses. Since the majority of our students ultimately aim to secure academic employment, we understand that they may be resistant to preparing for non-academic opportunities. Also, given our survey findings that our students' second most sought after career, after higher education, is teaching in secondary schools, we may explore ways to enhance training opportunities for students to pursue that path.

Department Faculty: Our meetings, discussions, and survey of history faculty revealed that they were well aware of the problem surrounding employment of humanities Ph.D.s, and understood that this problem is widespread. The project allowed us the opportunity to have frank discussions about the strengths of our program and potential areas for improvement. It underlined the need

for each faculty member to consider how he or she could be involved in enhancing training opportunities for graduate students.

Faculty members express reservations about broadening our focus beyond training students for research and teaching positions. Faculty rely on their own personal career experience as they advise students, and their ideas about the progress of a doctoral program are tailored to finding jobs like their own. Even as we know that it is increasingly unlikely that students will find such jobs, many faculty either do not know enough about other paths or resist the idea that we can or should provide professional training other than for academia. Some faculty perceive that we will be “watering down” our rigor or sacrificing the intrinsic value of the humanities to a more presentist and functional outlook. Others feel personally unprepared to advise on non-academic careers.

During project meetings, faculty agreed that program enhancements must be built around program strengths. We thus began with an exploration of the elements we collectively view as crucial to doctoral training in history, including: 1) Creating new historical knowledge, built on a foundation of historiography and the original interpretation of sources and data; 2) Developing knowledge of, and the ability to communicate in, at least one additional language, including but not limited to a foreign language; 3) Developing the ability to write and communicate clearly with both professional and lay audiences; and, 4) Developing the ability to manage a research project from conception to completion.

Despite some reservations, on the whole faculty also expressed a willingness to participate in efforts to enhance doctoral training or program modification in a variety of respects, including: 1) Co-advising with faculty members from history and other departments so students may be exposed to multiple areas of expertise; 2) Offering skills-based seminars, such as Writing History for Public Audiences; 3) Instituting a paid internship program; 4) Reviewing and possibly modifying the current mix of core/breadth/elective course requirements; 5) Ensuring that the department more clearly articulates the mission, goals, and learning outcomes of the history doctorate; 6) Enhancing individual faculty advisory skills via a handful of one-hour sessions focused on advisor training; 7) Developing a public history certificate program; and, 8) Increasing students' ability to complete coursework or comprehensive exam fields outside of the department.

Faculty and Administrators Outside of Department: FIU faculty and administrators outside of the Department were impacted by, and shaped, the project in various ways. Our planning meetings allowed us a forum to interact with faculty from the College of Business, the College of Public Health, the Department of Public Administration, and the Libraries. Colleagues in these areas learned that our humanities department is a willing partner, eager to learn about and pursue interdisciplinary training efforts in the interest of our graduate students. Dr. Seema Pissaris offered us perspective on innovative coursework ongoing in the College of Business Administration, and made us aware of potential opportunities that exist for our students to gain

training in entrepreneurship and other related fields. Florence Greer, from the College of Public Health, provided insights about the design, structure, and goals of the internship program for Masters in Public Health students. She shared with us her College's official documents, which could serve as guideposts as we consider enhancing our own internship program. Dr. David Park in the School of Communication and Journalism discussed digital and new media skills transferable to the humanities, elaborating on the tools, strategies, tactics, and messages involved in strategic communications. Dr. Jennifer Fu shared information about resources that could help our students enhance their backgrounds in digital humanities. Dr. Keith Revell, an historian who is a professor in the Department of Public Administration, shared trenchant feedback throughout the year, and some sobering impressions. FIU's measure of a successful Ph.D. program, he noted, is the production of five graduates per year. That number could be beyond what the academic market can sustain. Maureen Pelham, from the university's Office of Research and Development, was also a crucial partner. At the completion of the project, she noted that she appreciated gaining a deeper understanding of the rigors and challenges of academic training in history. She also encouraged the Department to undertake a more extended analysis of other university's efforts to adapt their curricula, and to proactively create a culture in which the pursuit of non-academic jobs is highly valued and training opportunities are enhanced.

External Partners and Alumni: Representatives of community organizations and institutions offered important insights during project meetings and gained an awareness of the prospective benefits of partnering with our Department and students. Dr Richard Florida, a private sector consultant; Xavier Vega, a grants administrator with a Community Redevelopment Agency; and Dr. John Stuart, Director of the Miami Beach Urban Studios, offered insights about some of the skills necessary to enter their fields and helped push the committee to consider how graduate students could gain training in grant-writing, government work, and business. Dr. Jon Mogul, Bethany Gray, and Dr. Jessica Barrella each shared valuable insights not only about their fields – museums and government work – but also about their personal journeys transitioning from being trained in the humanities to pursuing non-academic jobs. Presentations by these outside partners bolstered our beliefs that 1) Historians who have been successful in non-academic jobs should play a larger role in informing our future efforts; 2) Our students could gain valuable skills if the Department institutes an internship or professional training program.

It is worth noting that all of our external and nonacademic participants stressed the high value of internships, particularly paid internships, and other project experiences. These can help tremendously when students seek to make the transition from academia to another career field.

We were also able to articulate to the external advisors the sorts of skills, training and insights that an individual with a Ph.D. in the humanities could bring to their workplaces. Whether the field was business or policy related, scientific or technical, the external participants readily agreed, and in many cases already understood, that humanities students represented “value-added.” They, and we, concluded that it is important to develop a language that students could use in job application materials – cover letters and CVs or resumes, for example – that would let

potential employers see and understand this value better. Several stressed that each field has a different expected style of presentation and students seeking employment must learn it before venturing to apply for a position.

Part IV: What Will We Do Next?

From our planning process, we have in mind a number of immediate and long-term steps to take to enhance our doctoral program. Although we do not expect to undertake every one of them, we wanted to present you with a full list of ideas. The long term ones will require further discussions with members of the Department and the administration, as well as additional resources.

A. Immediate Steps

1. We are preparing a lengthy session for the faculty in the early fall Department retreat to discuss the planning year experience and the contents of the White Paper, as well as to respond to additional questions and concerns they may have raised regarding possible changes to the doctoral program.
2. There is a sense in the Department that it is time to reconsider our Ph.D. comprehensive exams and field structure. Though not motivated solely by the desire to provide alternative career paths, this is a good opportunity to build on some of the lessons we took from our study. These include the possibility of a field in public history or an alternative (such as a digital project, exhibit, or policy paper) to the traditional comprehensive exam; a portfolio of diverse work rather than comprehensive exams; encouragement of interdisciplinary fields; and, replacement of one language requirement with an alternative skill in statistics or digital technology.
3. A strong message received from our external consultants was that internship and work experience count greatly toward employability. The Department already provides internship opportunities, primarily for MA students completing the Public History option. In the last three years we have been encouraging Ph.D. students to complete internships as well. We have constructed a database of institutions and partners in the community with whom students have done internships, and a member of the Department advises students seeking such opportunities. We can continue to make this information available to faculty advisors and students by sharing periodic highlights of recent successful internships through our website, newsletter, and social media. Our belief is that by providing information and structure, we can help students take charge of soliciting their own internship opportunities, itself an important part of the career development process.
4. One of our Core Team members, the senior administrator in the Graduate School, has promised to investigate a number of issues that may be acting as roadblocks to innovating career experiences for students. One of them is a prohibition on outside employment for Ph.D.

students, since their funding runs 12 months a year. Paid internships are generally considered more valuable than unpaid internships, so we are looking for ways to relax the prohibition.

5. In several parts of the university, mini courses and workshops teaching specific skills are available (digital library, business school, Center for Leadership) and there are opportunities for our students to gain “secondary” areas of expertise. For example, we have recently been in communication with the School of Education and found that students could pursue a set of graduate-level courses there that would certify them to teach in public schools. This, along with other university-based opportunities for professional development, are being compiled into a spreadsheet, which will help guide our thinking on how students might take outside classes without detracting from the pursuit of their degree, or adding burdens to their schedules.

6. We received a strong sense that having students engage in career planning early on is valuable. We will assess career-planning tools and resources that might be available from the university career counseling office, make faculty and incoming Ph.D. students aware of them, and evaluate whether and how the Department can offer enhancements.

B. Longer Term Plans Requiring Additional Funding

1. To keep students and faculty apprised of ongoing research, discussions and opportunities, we would like to develop a webpage entirely dedicated to humanities career issues. This page would also reinforce the messages about internship and other experiential opportunities students are undertaking, while making faculty and students aware of the latest thinking about the value of humanities beyond the professoriate.

2. There was a strong message that it would help to introduce students to individuals employed in nonacademic fields. Accordingly, we would like to begin a speaker series and workshops with invited guests and alumnae working outside of academia. We envisage such forums as open students across the humanities. They would as well provide a place for individuals from the private and public sectors to learn about the value humanities-trained employees can bring to their organizations. Funding will be needed to host these guests.

3. Since Ph.D.s have fewer assigned duties in the summer, we are considering a summer seminar on career options and diversity skills, perhaps modeled on the NEH Summer Seminars.

4. Cross-disciplinary team-taught classes can provide students with both skills and contacts to help them bring their humanities training to other fields and careers. Such classes will require support and buy-in from faculty in different departments and deans from different colleges. They will also require financial resources to make up for the reduced teaching load derived from team-teaching of early cohorts.

5. Some faculty were uneasy with the prospect of guiding students to nonacademic careers because they felt they lacked the necessary expertise to do so. We would like to acquire

resources to provide training and support to faculty for this purpose, so that they can either help to guide students or know where to send students for such guidance.

6. We would also like to expand paid internship opportunities. This may require seed funds to subsidize early cohorts and incentivize institutions lacking financial resources to host doctoral students.

7. As the possible paths for careers in the humanities are changing, we hope to advertise to a wider range of prospective Ph.D. students the opportunities for academic as well as nonacademic careers. The FIU Graduate School currently provides some funds for marketing, but we may need to broaden our recruitment net, consider alternative skills from those traditionally valued in prospective students, and develop new marketing materials.

8. The dissertation remains at the core of the humanities Ph.D. Although we discussed various ways that the dissertation might be modified, there was a sense that most of the faculty will have trouble imagining an alternative to what is now familiar. Accordingly, we believe that this issue will require further discussion, perhaps facilitated by examining programs (Carnegie Mellon, University of California, Santa Barbara, Duke University) that have already found ways to combine the history dissertation with a broader public policy purpose.

Appendix A:

Core Team Members

Kenneth Lipartito	PI	Department of History
April Merleaux	Co-PI	Department of History
Jessica Adler	Co-PI	Department of History
Victor Uribe	Chair	Department of History
Kirsten Wood	DGS	Department of History
Rebecca Friedman	Faculty Fellow	Academic Affairs & Department of History
Maureen Pelham	Director	Office of Research & Economic Development
Mayra Beers	Director	Center for Leadership
Jeff Gonzalez	Associate Dean	School of International & Public Affairs
Keith Revell	Faculty	Department of Public Administration
Lisa Howe	Post Doc	Department of History
Megan Melvin	Ph.D. Student	Department of History

Appendix B:

Advisory Group Members

Seema Pissaris	Faculty	College of Business Administration
Richard Florida	Consultant	Creative Class Group
Bethany Gray	Historic Preservation and Curatorial Manager	Deering Estate
Florence Greer	Faculty	College of Public Health and Social Work
Jennifer Fu	Librarian	FIU Digital Library
Jessica Barrella	Analyst	U. S. Department of Defense
Jon Mogul	Director of Education	Wolfsonian-FIU Museum
John Stuart	Faculty & Director	Miami Beach Urban Studios
Xavier Vega	Grants Administrator	Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Authority
Evelyn Gaiser	Faculty	Department of Biology & Everglades Long-Term Ecological Research Program